



Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Greece Holy Synod in Resistance

Proposals for Curing the Eschatological Fear of Marks (Seals) and Numbers

Introductory Reflections

1 Since 1995, the Holy Synod in Resistance has, by way of a special commission, closely followed and studied the contemporary proliferation of “Antichristology” (issues surrounding the “Antichrist”) and its dangerous side-effects. A fruit of this study is the detailed memorandum of some seventy pages that was approved by the Holy Synod in 2000, though, in anticipation of more auspicious circumstances, it was not judged expedient to publish it forthwith.

2 In submitting this memorandum, now, to the judgment of the conscience of the Church, we deem it necessary to offer some introductory thoughts, in order,

- on the one hand, to clarify the reasons for the relatively long delay in presenting our findings;
- and, on the other hand, to promote a fuller awareness of the gravity of contemporary eschatological anxieties and the immediate danger that authentic Orthodox eschatology will be altered, should the reasons for, and mentality underlying, such anxieties gain acceptance.

3 Thus, in the first place, with regard to our delay, we would like to make it clear that the original instructions given to the special commission were to investigate the putative connection between bar codes and the number 666, since the new national identity cards [in Greece, that is] then in the production process were to carry bar codes.

- a.** It was, however, very easy to clarify this issue, that is, the existence or non-existence of “666” on bar codes—which is purely technological

in nature—on the basis of scientific specifications regarding the production and operation of bar codes. Therefore, we had good reason to expect that, by announcing the truth that bar codes have absolutely no connection with the number 666, we could provide the faithful with a feeling of relief that would, in turn, diminish the intensity of their agony.

- b.** Nevertheless, our investigation helped us to realize very quickly that the disquiet of the faithful did not pertain exclusively to the relationship between bar codes (and, more broadly, identity cards) and the number 666, but that this question was simply the center around which there revolved a series of connected problems and anxieties. If we did not deal with them as a whole, and give a common answer to them, we knew that we would not, in the end, be helping our flock to emerge from the confusion into which it had fallen, or protecting it from similar situations in the future.
- c.** Another very serious factor which delayed our work was that, with the passage of time, these related problems, which needed to be addressed in common, were rapidly and continually proliferating and were, furthermore, becoming so bedeviled by arbitrary twists and turns that new horizons for investigation and scrutiny were constantly opening up in our endeavor to arrive at a fuller cognizance and understanding of this truly unprecedented, many-sided, and very complex ecclesiastical and social phenomenon.



4 In the second place, and as a corollary to the foregoing, with true anguish in Christ, and falling down prayerfully before the guiding Grace of the Most Blessed Theotokos, we have come face to face with the great seriousness of contemporary eschatological frenzy and with the soteriological dangers entailed by an uncritical acceptance of all of the misinterpretations, as well as the extra-ecclesiastical factors, that such frenzy entails.

- a. Our investigation has made it abundantly clear that, after two millennia of its life, our Most Holy Orthodox Church is passing through a period of what may be called a “Third Wave of Eschatology,” which confirms with particular intensity the many-sided crisis facing the Body of the Church and the distressing realization that It has lost, or is liable to lose, those charismatic criteria that would enable it to diagnose correctly and confront successfully the challenges of history.
- b. By way of clarification, the period of the so-called “First Wave of Eschatology” covers the first three centuries of Christianity: at that time, the historical challenges (severe persecutions, the grave danger posed by the many-branched heresy of Gnosticism, the laxity and secularization of Christian morality, and the acceptance of divergent Messianic ideas from Judaism) contributed to an adulteration of Orthodox eschatology.
 - During this period, Chapter 20 of the Apocalypse was interpreted literally, and Christians awaited the thousand-year reign, or interregnum [of Christ], as the redemptive conclusion [of history]. Eminent figures in the Church unwittingly advocated Chiliasm (Millennialism) as a fundamental teaching of the new Faith (Sts. Papias, Justin, Irenæus, Methodios, Hippolytos, Victorinus, *et al.*).
- c. The period of the so-called “Second Wave of Eschatology” covers the gloomy centuries of the Turkish Yoke: then, too, historical challenges (the collapse of the Christian empire, slavery, degradation, Islamization, intense

Roman Catholic propaganda, and profound theological influence from the Protestant West especially) contributed to a new attempt to distort Orthodox eschatology.

- During this period, attention was focussed on Chapter 13 of the Apocalypse, which was likewise given a literal interpretation. The Pope and Papism and Mohammed and Islam (Latins and Turks) were seen as the two “Beasts,” or even the Antichrist himself. Their destruction and the simultaneous resurrection of the Orthodox Greek Empire were again awaited as a thousand-year reign or interregnum. At a popular level, prominent figures in the Greek nation cultivated these ideas as authentic revelations.

5 Our study of the pathology of the contemporary “Third Wave of Eschatology” lasted for two decades (1980-2000), and has demonstrated its kinship, *mutatis mutandis*, with the two preceding waves: now it is overwhelming historical challenges (a dizzying advance in scientific achievements and their practical applications, the unification of the world by way of globalization at many levels, the free circulation of ideas, the rapid expansion of non-Christian beliefs and morals, polymorphous syncretism, a profound secularization among Christians, the shattering of age-old social norms, and a slavish acceptance of eschatological ideas from Protestantism) that are contributing to a renewed effort to corrupt Orthodox eschatology.

- During this period, Chapter 13 of the Apocalypse has yet again been accorded a literal interpretation. Attention is now directed to the “mark” and the “number” of the Beast, and bar codes and kindred automated electronic systems are seen as inaugurating the era of the Antichrist, in which a moneyless economic system will prevail. In the context of such a system, any card whatsoever will supposedly function as a “mark” and “number of the Beast”; the European Union will become the first “Beast,” and the super-computer in Brussels the second “Beast,” while the Antichrist will be the President of the European Union, etc.

6 It is noteworthy that the following are common characteristics of all three waves of eschatology:

- a. A misunderstanding of the true nature of the Apocalypse; namely, its metaphorical and spiritual meaning.
- b. An unremitting endeavor to interpret the Apocalypse *ad litteram*.
- c. The notion that the Apocalypse constitutes a futuristic text, that is, a codified collection of oracles or a prophetic chronology, disclosing specific historical developments in the Church and in world history.
- d. An attempt at decoding or deciphering the symbols of the Apocalypse by means of historical events in each given period.
- e. The idea that the Apocalypse was written for a specific epoch and pertains exclusively, and is to be identified with, the period of each wave.
- f. An endeavor to interpret the Apocalypse in relation to an historical center: Rome and its idolatrous Empire, Mohammed and the Ottoman Empire, Moscow and Gog or Magog, or Brussels and the European Union.
- g. The influence of non-Christian (certain putatively Jewish) and heterodox (Protestant) eschatological beliefs on the interpretation of the Apocalypse.

7 It is the firm conviction of our Holy Synod that an unchecked process, over the course of many years, involving the dissemination and admixture of non-Orthodox eschatological beliefs (of popular and non-ecclesiastical provenance) has produced a lethal combination, which has had a direct and deep influence on the faithful, has led them into indescribable confusion, and is impelling them to adopt an anti-ecclesiastical and antisocial ethos.

8 Even though the situation is deteriorating on a daily basis, the experience of the two previous waves of eschatology affords Orthodox Shepherds in our time—and especially those who, by God’s mercy, are grounded in the He-

sychnastic and Eucharistic ethos of the Church—a fruitful opportunity to act in a therapeutic spirit and to deliver the faithful from eschatological anxiety through the promotion of Orthodox eschatology, which sheds peace and which is centered on the renewal and preservation of the Seal of the Lamb, the sole precondition for participation “in the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9).

9 These introductory thoughts already refer to a rather broad set of issues that certainly cannot be dealt with fully or in detail by such a concise report as this. We aim merely to provide a preliminary pastoral approach to these matters.

- a. For the time being, we will dwell on crucial matters and undertake “a work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12), “lest that which is lame be put out of joint, but rather that it be healed” (Hebrews 12:13), addressing ourselves in a clear and simple manner to those faithful who are well-disposed.
- b. Two other pertinent works, both very complex and lengthy, which constitute the operational basis and the theoretical foundation of the present memorandum, will be submitted to the conscience of the Church after the publication of this introductory report.

10 Since prayer, as the Holy Fathers have taught us, is the path to Divine knowledge, and insofar as it is only in “a spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:17) that matters of our Holy Faith, and especially those pertaining to the Apocalypse, can be approached and understood, we have composed a prayer of supplication, so that the faithful may commence and continue their study of the Apocalypse, beseeching and seeking the Divine illumination of the Comforter.

Least among Bishops in the Lord,

† *Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi*,
Acting President of the
Holy Synod in Resistance



A Prayer of Supplication for the Correct Understanding of What Is To Happen in the Last Times

O Lord, our God and Savior, Who, in Thine ineffable goodness, didst humble Thyself and by the Economy of Thine Incarnation didst return that which was lost to the bosom of Thy Father; Who didst command us that we should be vigilant in prayer and in expectation of Thy glorious Second Coming, wherein Thou shalt come to judge the living and the dead and to transform all things, so that in a new Heaven and earth Thy servants may enjoy Thine unending Kingdom in the Holy Spirit: Do Thou Thyself, O Master, accept even now the supplication of us, Thy humble and unworthy servants, enlighten our minds and hearts, that we may correctly understand and unerringly interpret what is to happen in the last times according to Thy good pleasure, that, by Thy Grace that bringeth peace, there may not be schisms in Thine immaculate Bride, the Orthodox Church, but unity and sanctification in harmony and love, and deem us worthy of that portion of the virgins who were wise in vigilance and sobriety.

By the intercessions of Thy Most Blessed Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary, and of all Thy Saints. Amen.



- ❖ “For this reason, before we undertake anything, and all the more so before we theologize, it behooves us to begin with prayer, not in order to attract Divine Power, which is present everywhere and yet nowhere, but in order to entrust ourselves to It and be united with It through Divine reminders and invocations” (St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, Ch. III, §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. III, col. 680D).

- ❖ “May the Spirit lift the veil from our eyes, that we may thereby on the one hand understand the wonders and behold the Mystery of Christ through the mirror of the letter, and on the other hand see the beauty of virtue that is manifested by the Prophets and which summons us to enhance our moral life therewith” (St. Theophylact of Ohrid, “Preface to the Exegesis of the Holy Prophets,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXVI, col. 576A).

